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1) Cabinet support rate drops to 16.7 PERCENT in Jiji Press poll, with DPJ head Ozawa now 10 points higher in popularity than Prime Minister Aso

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 1) (Full)
December 20, 2008

According to a Jiji Press opinion poll carried out on Dec. 12-15, the Aso Cabinet's support rate plummeted 22.1 points from last month to 16.7 PERCENT, while the non-support rate soared 28.2 points to 64.7 PERCENT. Even on the question, "Which politician is more appropriate as prime minister?", only 23.9 PERCENT of the respondents chose Prime Minister Taro Aso, while 34.8 PERCENT picked Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) President Ichiro Ozawa. With the cabinet support rate having fallen below the 20 PERCENT line, it is inevitable that there will be an impact on the timing of the Diet's dissolution for a snap election and on moves by members of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to distance themselves from

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Prime Minister Aso.

The survey was carried by face-to-face interviews among 2,000 male and female adults. The effective rate of response was 66.3 PERCENT

As for support rates for political parties, the ruling DPJ dropped 5.2 points to 18.6 PERCENT, while the DPJ slipped 0.9 point to 13.4 PERCENT, indicating as before that it is not replacing the LDP as a target for popular support. In addition, the coalition partner New Komeito inched up by 0.1 points to 4.3 PERCENT, while the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) rose 0.6 point to 2.0 PERCENT, and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) rose 0.3 point to 1.1 PERCENT. Those who supported no party increased 6.0 points to 58.2 PERCENT.

2) Prime Minister's aides shocked by Jiji Press opinion poll showing cabinet support rate has dropped to 16.7 PERCENT

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
December 20, 2008

According to a Jiji Press opinion poll carried out Dec. 12-15 and released on the 19th, the support rate of the cabinet of Prime Minister Taro Aso fell 22.1 points from last month's level to 16.7 PERCENT. This is the first time for the support level to drop below the 20-percent line in any poll. This has happened even though Prime Minister Aso has worked hard to raise his cabinet's support rate, even inspecting an employment agency on Dec. 19. An aide was prompted to say, "The only thing to do now is bear it."

An aide to the Prime Minister was unable to conceal his surprise, saying: "This is a shocking result, since the Prime Minister on Dec. 12 just delivered a press conference on his jobs package." In a Mainichi poll carried out on Dec. 6-7, the cabinet support rate dropped to 21 PERCENT, so his press conference on Dec. 12 was aimed to stop that trend.

The Prime Minister's Official Resident (Kantei), which has become increasingly alarmed, had Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura bring into his press conference a panel that laid out briefing material on the government's job measures. He explained for eight minutes explaining the package. He criticized the bills related to job creation presented to the Upper House by the Democratic Party of Japan, saying, "There are a number of problems with them including

budgetary backing for the contents."

On the other hand, regarding the sagging support rate, Kawamura would go no farther than to say: "As policy is steadily implemented, we will seek the understanding of the nation."

3) LDP survey report shows core supporters are deserting the party, regardless of location, gender, or generational lines; Strong calls for the DPJ to be next ruling party

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Abridged)
December 20, 2009

The contents of a recent survey carried out by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) report on voter consciousness were revealed on Dec. 19. With the support rate of the Aso Cabinet plummeting, the survey confirmed that the party's support base was crumbling and concluded: "Support from the conservative strata, which form the

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core support base, is wavering. This is especially true among women." As a result, the party is filled with sense of crisis. The party executive, upon receiving the report, is hurriedly drafting policy measures prior to the next Lower House election, and boiling down a public-relations strategy.

Since late last year for almost a year, the LDP's project team to grasp the public will (chaired by Lower House member Hirokazu Matsuno) has carried out through hearings and other means a survey, the results of which were compiled and presented on Dec. 18 to Secretary General Hiroyuki Hosoda. The report confirmed: "There is a view transcending locality, age, and gender of not putting the LDP into power with the next election and letting the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) have a try." The report underscored the reality that not only are organized groups abandoning the party, but also that it will not be possible to secure new support.

As for the reason, the report analyzed that the keywords of stability, peace of mind, and accomplishment, were applicable also to the DPJ under a two-party system, and that "voters had two choices of switching from one party to the other that they could use at any time." At the hearings, the severe view from supporters was heard from one LDP backer (over 70 years old) that "(The party) has reached the end of its life span."

The cause of the supporters leaving the LDP, it was pointed out, was that by prioritizing elections based on organizational support, the party could only grasp the will of special interests. The view was that it was essential for the party to build a system of making policy that reflected the will of those who were not part of any organization, namely, those referred to as the unaffiliated voters.

In specific terms, it was proposed that the party actively use focus groups of the kind used by the Clinton camp in the U.S. presidential election in 1992.

4) Sato asked U.S. for nuclear retaliation in case of war with China

ASAHI (Top play) (Abridged)
December 22, 2008

In January 1965, Prime Minister Eisaku Sato visited the United States and met with Secretary of Defense McNamara. In the meeting, their conversation referred to China's first nuclear test that was conducted three months before Sato's visit to Washington at that time. In that meeting, Sato expressed hope that the United States will immediately carry out nuclear retaliation against China should a war break out between Japan and China, indicating that Sato tolerated a nuclear war. This became clear in a diplomatic document disclosed by the Foreign Ministry under the date of Dec. 22.

The Sato-McNamara meeting took place on Jan. 13, 1965. Meanwhile, China conducted a nuclear test in October of the preceding year. Concerning this nuclear test, McNamara remarked that future

developments in the next couple of years will be noteworthy. In this respect, McNamara asked Sato if Japan would try to develop nuclear weapons or not. In response, Sato told McNamara that Japan was opposed to the idea of possessing and using nuclear weapons, thereby stressing that Japan would choose to remain under the 'U.S. nuclear umbrella.'

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Sato also remarked: "When it comes to nuclear introduction (into Japan), this is stipulated in the security treaty. In the case of bringing (nuclear weapons) onto the ground (of Japan), I'd like to ask you to be careful about what you are saying." He added: "If there is a war (with China), that is not the case. I hope the United States will immediately retaliate with nuclear weapons. On that occasion, it would not be easy to build ground facilities for nuclear weapons. But in the case of sea-based ones, I think it's possible to invoke right away." McNamara said, "There's no technical problem."

Remarks beyond principle

Hideki Kan, a professor of the history of diplomacy between Japan and the U.S. at Seinan Jo Gakuin University, comments: "Prime Minister Sato went beyond the principle of nuclear weapons intended to avoid a war, and he went so far as to propose nuclear retaliation. If such a remark had been brought to light, his cabinet could have been toppled. Prime Minister Sato was well aware that the United States was concerned about Japan's option of going nuclear, and he implied the nuclear option in an aim to alert his U.S. counterpart. China's nuclear possession was about to become a reality. In that situation, his remark there, in a sense, was probably a diplomatic card intended to ensure even more certain security."

5) USFJ realignment: Related outlays in next fiscal-year budget to expand 3.6 fold, with implementation of project to relocate (Okinawa-based U.S. Marines) to Guam

MAINICHI (Page 7) (Full)
December 20, 2008

Outlays related to the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan in the fiscal 2009 national budget were set on Dec. 19 at 68.92 billion yen by coordination between the defense and finance ministries. Based on the roadmap agreed on by the Japanese and U.S. governments in May 2005, a project to move U.S. Marines stationed in Okinawa to Guam that includes building a facility on that island will be implemented starting in fiscal 2009. In order to accomplish this, the related expenditures will expand 3.6 fold from the current fiscal year, an amount totaling 19.1 billion yen.

The contents of the realignment-related outlays include: 1) approximately 34.6 billion yen for such projects as readying the building site on Guam for construction of a facility related to the relocation of Okinawa-based Marines and construction of an access road; 2) approximately 9.3 billion yen for constructing billets connected to the relocation of MCAS Futenma to a site on the coastal portion of Camp Schwab (Nago City); and 3) approximately 9.1 billion yen for realignment subsidies to be paid to local governments that cooperate in the USFJ realignment.

The move to Guam is scheduled for completion by 2014, as set by the road map. Fiscal 2009 will be the first fiscal year for implementation of the project. Japan's share of the burden, which is estimated at \$2.8 billion (250 billion yen) is likely to be subject to intense study now, given the country's severe fiscal straits.

On the other hand, in connection with the Futenma relocation, talks between local governments, including Okinawa Prefecture, which is

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seeking to move the relocation site into the ocean, and the central government have bogged down, and the budget allocation for the

actual project has been put off.

6) Vice foreign minister in meeting with Iraqi prime minister conveys Japan's willingness to continue aid for Iraq

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
December 22, 2008

(Baghdad, Kyodo News)

Vice Foreign Minister Seiko Hashimoto visited Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, on Dec. 21 with no prior announcement and met with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Hashimoto conveyed to him the Japanese government's willingness to continue cooperation in reconstructing Iraq although Air Self-Defense Force troops ended their humanitarian reconstruction mission there. The prime minister replied: "I am thankful for Japan's great contributions through the dispatch of the Self-Defense Force."

Hashimoto also met Vice President Adel Abdel Mahdi and said that Japan is ready to dispatch a mission to monitor the local elections in Iraq scheduled for Jan. 31.

This is the first visit to Iraq by a Japanese high-ranking official since then Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Akira Amari visited the country this June.

In meeting with the vice president, Hashimoto said: "Japan will work toward a further strengthened long-term, strategic partnership with Iraq and will cooperate in reconstructing the nation and forming untroubled and safe living conditions also in the future." She thus emphasized that Japan is willing to strengthen relations with Iraq with such development aid as yen loans and the transfer of technology.

According to Hashimoto, al Maliki expressed his strong hope for Japanese companies' participation in an oilfield development project in Iraq. Hashimoto replied: "The government and the private sector will do their best to respond to his expectation."

Hashimoto also asked the Iraqi government's support for Japan's bid to bring the 2016 Olympic Games to Tokyo. The prime minister reportedly indicated a positive view in response to her request.

7) Spot environmental inspections eyed for U.S. bases in Okinawa

AKAHATA (Page 1) (Full)
December 20, 2008

The Okinawa prefectural assembly held a plenary meeting yesterday to wind up its November regular session and unanimously adopted a draft ordinance for environmental conservation with an amendment. The assembly also passed a supplementary resolution.

The Japanese Communist Party presented the amendment, using its right to submit bills to the assembly. The amendment, in its third article, specified three specific points for Okinawa Prefecture to implement. One is that Okinawa Prefecture may propose concluding an agreement with those in charge of managing U.S. military bases in order to reduce aircraft noise and other environmental issues

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resulting from U.S. military bases.

The second point is to expedite reusing the sites of U.S. military bases after they are returned. To do so, the Okinawa prefectural government may propose incorporating a clause in that agreement to disclose information about the history of land uses and the condition of soil contamination.

Thirdly, Okinawa may propose conducting on-the-spot inspections of U.S. military bases in cases of air, water, and soil contamination and to clear up its causes in case it is believed to be ascribable to U.S. military bases.

In addition, the supplementary resolution cites five points. One of

the points cited in the resolution is to call on U.S. forces to respond at once if and when Okinawa's prefectural or municipal governments propose an on-the-spot inspection of U.S. military bases. The resolution also calls for applying domestic laws to activities at U.S. military bases in order to protect the environment of local communities. The resolution strongly calls for the Japanese and U.S. governments to take necessary steps to facilitate the five points.

8) New Komeito approves specifying "fiscal 2011" in mid-term program, on condition of not linking it to consumption tax hike

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
December 20, 2008

The government and the ruling parties continued coordination yesterday over a mid-term program on drastic tax reform, including a consumption tax hike. The ruling camp's project team, headed by Fukushima Nukaga, shared the view in its meeting that the government should present a clear-cut roadmap for economic recovery on the premise of increasing taxes. The New Komeito approved the government's plan to specify fiscal 2011 for economic recovery on the condition of not linking it to the timing for raising the consumption tax.

A senior New Komeito member told reporters after the meeting: "It would be possible to write, 'we will aim at picking up the economy within three years'."

This remark is intended to oppose the use of an expression that could be interpreted as a consumption tax hike while approving revealing the policy of aiming at economic recovery by fiscal 2011.

The government's Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy has proposed inserting these words in the mid-term program that drastic tax reform should be started in fiscal 2011 after the economy turns around and be implemented in stages by fiscal 2015. The New Komeito has opposed specifying the time for a consumption tax hike. The government intends to continue efforts to iron out differences with the ruling camp, with an eye on a cabinet decision on the 24th.

9) Sales tax to be raised in stages to 10 PERCENT , state minister for economic and fiscal policy reveals

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 1) (Full)
December 22, 2008

Referring to the extent of a proposed hike in the sale tax to

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finance social security spending, State Minister for Economic and Fiscal Policy Hajime Yosano stated that in his view it would be necessary to raise in stages the tax to 10 PERCENT by fiscal 2015. He noted, "The government will hike the consumption tax by 5 PERCENT (by fiscal 2015)."

The government is now undergoing coordination with the ruling parties for the compilation of a mid-term program for social spending and the tax code. The program will mention the government's policy of hiking the consumption tax in fiscal 2011. However, the extent of the hike will not likely be included. Yosano's mentioning the planned extent the hike at this stage will likely have an impact on current discussions on the program.

Yosano said, "There are such proposals as to gradually raise the rate by 1 PERCENT a year or to raise it 2 PERCENT (in fiscal 2011) and then 3 PERCENT after that."

Yosano then pointed out that even if the rate of the consumption tax is hiked to 10 PERCENT by fiscal 2015, it would be difficult to finance social security spending. Noting the possibility of a further expansion of social security spending, he said that the government would have to consider what to do about social security in relation to the tax possibly by fiscal 2025.

10) ODA cut constrained to 4 PERCENT in fiscal 2009 budget due to

additional funds allocated from promotional framework

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)
December 22, 2008

The Finance Ministry on December 21 decided to allocate approximately 9.5 billion yen to the official development assistance (ODA) budget from a 333 billion yen framework in the fiscal 2009 budget set by Prime Minister Aso to promote important programs. The aim is to tap the fund to strengthen the nation's diplomatic capabilities as advocated by the prime minister. The Finance Ministry in its draft budget for the fiscal 2009 budget trimmed the ODA budget to 662.7 billion yen, down 5.4 PERCENT from the fiscal 2008 initial budget. If 9.5 billion yen is allocated to the ODA budget from the promotional funds, the extent of the cut would be constrained to about 4 PERCENT .

The government incorporated in its basic policy guidelines on economic and fiscal management and structural reforms for the fiscal 2006 national budget a policy of slashing the ODA budget by 2 PERCENT -4 PERCENT a year until fiscal 2011. The government has thus far cut the budget annually by 4 PERCENT . It had been expected to do so in the fiscal 2009 budget, as well.

Liberal Democratic Party Policy Research Council Chairman Hori and his New Komeito counterpart Yamaguchi on the 21st put together their party members' requests for the recovery of ODA budget allocations in the fiscal 2009 budget and asked Finance Minister and State Minister for Financial Policy Nakagawa to comply with their request. Prime Minister Aso and Nakagawa will meet on the 22nd and finalize the use of funds from the promotional framework and restore fiscal resources worth 20 billion yen, whose use has yet to be decided. The government intends to adopt its draft budget at a cabinet meeting on the 24th.

11) Only one lawmaker-initiated bill enacted in current Diet

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session

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Slightly abridged)
December 22, 2008

Only one bill sponsored by lawmakers has so far cleared the ongoing extraordinary Diet session, which is to end on Dec. 25. Even in the extraordinary session held last fall after the opposition camp won a majority in the House of Councillors in the election in July, 12 bills were passed into law. The current situation is quite unusual.

Only a bill amending the National Health Insurance Law to rescue uninsured children has been enacted in the current session. There are no prospects for other lawmaker-initiated bills now on the agenda to be passed in the Diet.

Under the politically divided Diet situation, 12 bills and 17 bills were enacted in the extraordinary Diet session last year and in the ordinary Diet session this year, respectively. In the ordinary Diet sessions and extraordinary Diet session that lasted more than one month in the past decade, seven to 23 bills proposed by lawmakers were enacted. Passing just one is unusual.

An increasing number of bills have been submitted by ruling party members recently, as a symbol of policymaking responsibility shifted from bureaucrats to politicians. There were days when policymaking by a cross-party of lawmakers was valued, for instance, in dealing with North Korea.

Now that the opposition camp controls the House of Councillors, however, bills presented by opposition parties as counterproposals to government bills are gaining influence and have been used for political purposes.

Cited as a typical case is the enactment in an Upper House plenary session on Dec. 19 of four employment bills submitted by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the Social Democratic Party, and the People's New Party. The Liberal Democratic Party has fiercely

reacted to the DPJ's move, with one senior Upper House member saying: "The DPJ is using legislation that it has no intention to enact as a tool for political purposes."

It should be rational for employment measures to be presented after the ruling and opposition camps held consultations, but an LDP Diet Affairs Committee member said resignedly: "With the run-up to the dissolution of the House of Representatives, it is impossible to see efforts to promote talks gain momentum."

12) Senior DPJ officials to visit U.S. possibly next month to build network of personal connections with Obama administration

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)
December 21, 2008

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) on December 20 decided to dispatch party executives to the United States, possibly in January 2009 right after the inauguration of Barack Obama as president. The delegation will be led by Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama. The party will coordinate for a possible meeting with Vice President-elect Biden. The aim is to take the initiative from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which has been attaching excessive importance to relations with the Bush administration. The DPJ wishes

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to build a network of personal connections with the Democratic administration, taking advantage of the change in government in that nation.

U.S. Democratic Party members who once served in key national defense-related posts met with senior DPJ officials in Tokyo on the 19th and called on them to make a U.S. visit. The American side reportedly said that since most of U.S. politicians believe that Japan favors the Republican Party, it is advisable for the DPJ to quickly dispatch its members to the U.S. and build ties with the Obama administration.

Delivering a speech in Yokkaichi City, Mie Prefecture on December 20, Vice President Katsuya Okada, who was at the meeting, took a positive stance, saying, "I would like to build relations with President-elect Obama's administration shortly, based on the U.S. side's wishes." Referring to President Clinton's meeting with the heads of the opposition parties when he visited Japan right before the launching of the non-LDP Hosokawa administration in 1993, Okada said, "President Clinton encouraged the opposition parties." He then indicated his view, "Since there is a possibility of the DPJ taking power from the governing LDP this time, they may want to build relations with us."

13) U.S. Democratic Party approaches DPJ

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
December 20, 2008

Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) Deputy President Kan, DPJ Secretary General Hatoyama, and other party executives met yesterday at a Tokyo hotel with former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye and Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) President John Hamre, who are affiliated with the U.S. Democratic Party. The U.S. counterparts expressed concern over the DPJ's advocacy of suspending the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling activities in the Indian Ocean, and they asked the DPJ executives to visit the United States in order to build a relationship with the new U.S. administration under President-elect Obama.

Nye and others are visiting Japan for a symposium. The meeting was held at the U.S. side's request. Two DPJ vice presidents, Katsuya Okada and Seiji Maehara, and DPJ International Affairs Bureau Director General Tetsundo Iwakuni attended the meeting. On the U.S. side were CSIS Japan Chair Michael Green, a well-known Japan hand, and former Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly, who was chief delegate to the six-party talks.

One of those who attended the meeting quoted Nye as saying: "The DPJ's manifesto says the DPJ is opposed to relocating the U.S.

Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station and is calling for suspending the MSDF's refueling activities in the Indian Ocean. If you suddenly make these proposals to the Obama administration, they would not think you want to maintain our bilateral alliance."

Hamre suggested the need for the DPJ to hold discussions with the U.S. side in preparation for the case where the party takes office. With this, he called on the DPJ to have its executives and foreign policy planning officers visit the United States at the earliest possible time after the Obama administration is inaugurated.

"They implied it's important to deepen our communication with each

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other," Hatoyama told reporters yesterday.

ZUMWALT